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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2317
INFO RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7623
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1336
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8772
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1547
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9425
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 006411

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS: NEW PARTY LAUNCHED; DIALOGUE ENDS;
RUMORS ABOUND

REF: DHAKA 6392

Classified By: Econ Chief David Renz; reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (U) Former President Badruddoza ("B") Chowdhury and disgruntled BNP MP Col. Oli Ahmed launched their new Liberal Democratic Party on October 27 in Dhaka. Although the launch of the new party was not unexpected, many among the BNP were surprised by the number of BNP defections to the new party. According to Ahmed, some 40 current and former BNP MPs and ministers have announced for the LDP, including thirteen sitting ministers and MPs. Ahmed told yesterday's rally that 102 leaders of different parties have announced for the LDP. The Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB), B. Chowdhury's own political party, was dissolved and its supporters joined the LDP.

¶2. (U) Following the LDP's launch, there were reports of violence against the homes of several of the new party members, allegedly by local BNP youth groups. Two houses were burned and several other homes were broken into.

¶3. (U) Meanwhile, the BNP-Awami League (AL) dialogue over political reforms has collapsed, with both sides trading allegations and recriminations over whether BNP proposed/was only willing to accept Chief Election Commissioner Aziz as an alternative to former Chief Justice Hasan as Chief Advisor to the Caretaker Government. The AL has said it would not accept Aziz as an alternative to Hasan and has raised constitutional questions concerning his eligibility for the position.

¶4. (C) It is increasingly likely that the President will ask Hasan to serve as Chief Advisor. An announcement is possible the evening of October 27, with a formal appointment on October 28. Hasan remains torn over whether to accept the appointment, according to diplomats who have spoken with him. He remains concerned that his refusal to serve, absent political agreement on an alternative, would cause worse political turmoil (reftel).

¶5. (C) The President has maintained a low profile, with his office turning most callers away. His inaccessibility sparked rumors October 27 that he had again taken ill and been rushed to a military hospital. The rumors proved false. Both Ambassador Shamsher Chowdhury and State Minister for Home Affairs Babar confirmed to Ambassador that the President's health has not changed and he remains in charge at his home.

¶6. (U) The Awami League continues preparations for mass

protests in anticipation of Hasan's appointment, while the BNP vows to match the AL with protests of their own. Both parties have announced series of rallies starting October 28. The Dhaka police have banned people from carrying "oars, poles and sickles" in the city and the AL has already announced it will defy the ban. (Note: the AL has urged supporters to protest with oars and poles, while the BNP has urged its supporters to bring sickles. End note.) Chittagong Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury (AL) has vowed to shutdown Chittagong Port and the city of Chittagong starting October 28 if Hasan is appointed Chief Advisor.

17. (C) Comment: The BNP was taken aback by the number of defections to the LDP. While many were predictable, several reportedly caught the BNP by surprise. The BNP is already struggling with internal divisions. The timing of the LDP announcement will likely leave the BNP feeling more threatened as it leaves office, and more determined to see Hasan appointed as Chief Advisor. Hasan himself remains isolated and indecisive, neither of which bode well for his leadership, should he accept appointment as Chief Advisor. End comment.
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